

The University of Chicago

PROBLEMS OF NEGRO PUBLIC HIGH
SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN SELECTED
SOUTHERN CITIES

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE LIBRARY
SCHOOL IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

SEPTEMBER, 1945

By
VIRGINIA LACY JONES

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Purpose and Scope

The purposes of this investigation are to describe, discuss, and offer possible solutions to problems encountered in the development of Negro public school library service in fourteen southern cities. The system of dual education in the southern area has resulted in unique problems and patterns in public school education and library service which may be studied advantageously with respect to plans for future development. This study was initiated in the fall of 1944, and the field research was carried out in the spring of 1945. The project includes twenty Negro public high schools located in fourteen southern cities--the two largest cities¹ in each of seven southern states: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and Kentucky.

The larger cities in each of these states were selected with the assumption that public high schools, and consequently school library service, would be developed to a greater extent than in smaller cities, since urban centers with the largest populations are economically more able to provide more highly developed public educational systems. It is recognized that a study which is concentrated in the larger cities does not yield information about school library service in the smaller towns and rural areas, where conditions may be more typical. However, the section of that chapter that discusses the historical background and describes the present situations existing within the seven states, contains material that is suggestive of conditions in the smaller units. This investigation proposes to describe conditions that have existed in these twenty school libraries over the period 1941-45 inclusive, and to evaluate their programs in terms of causal factors and basic problems. A study such as this should precede a study of smaller towns

¹One exception was made in selecting the two largest cities in each of the seven states. Montgomery, Alabama, was used instead of Mobile, Alabama, because of the transportation difficulties involved in making a visit to Mobile.

and rural areas where available information is probably limited and vague and where facilities for Negro education and library service are considerably less developed. Since the same general trends and problems tend to exist to a certain extent throughout each state, the present study has value for smaller towns and rural areas in their planning programs for school library service to Negroes in the future. Also, generalizations applicable to areas larger than those isolated for specific study can probably be inferred reliably from the results of this investigation.

The study as a whole proposes to point out the major and minor problems involved in the development of functional library service programs which relate the library to the curriculum to non-curricular needs of pupils, and also to isolate the major problems of finance, planning, training and school personnel, direction and supervision, and evaluation. The historical development of public school library service in the South in general with special reference to Negro education and library development will provide background for the presentation of the problems that follow. Since school libraries derive their purposes from the aims and objectives of the schools they serve, it is first necessary to describe the characteristics of the twenty Negro public high schools selected for consideration. Therefore, first, a description of school populations, philosophies and objectives, and curricular offerings are presented. Next, the extent to which the library is related by means of its materials collection and activities to the curriculum, reading program and pupil needs are treated, and further, problems of finance and personnel are considered. In the concluding chapter the problems isolated throughout the study are summarized and solutions are offered and recommendations made. It is proposed that these suggestions will henceforth aid Negro school administrators and librarians in avoiding certain detrimental conditions which have given rise to the problems found and analyzed, and serve as a guide to the development of Negro public school library service.

Method

In making this evaluation of the functionalism and effectiveness of twenty Negro public school libraries so that basic problems might be determined, several techniques and procedures were used. An analysis of the library literature dealing with school library service in the South provided the historical back-

ground and material essential for the study. Data about the individual schools and about state direction and supervision of public school library service were secured by personal visits to the twenty schools and to the state departments of education in the seven states. On the basis of information obtained in personal interviews with principals, teachers, librarians, and pupils in the schools, and with the persons in charge of public school library service in the state departments of education, checklists were filled out by the investigator.

From two to three days were spent by the investigator in each of the twenty schools. A full description of the institutions was secured through personal interviews with principals and teachers, visits to classes, and general observation. The pupils in one class in each of the last four grades of each high school were asked to write the answers to eight questions concerning their reading interests and habits, and their attitude toward and use of the school library. A checklist was used to gather specific information about the library service program, resources, personnel, and finance. The materials gathered from these sources are presented in this study, and the findings on such aspects of library service as staff, finance, and resources are evaluated on the basis of state, regional, and national school library standards. Internal administrative policies and practices are evaluated in terms of principles set forth by accepted authorities in the field.

Both qualitative and quantitative measures have been used to determine the educational functionalism of the school libraries. Checklists of significant titles were constructed in order to evaluate the book collections for their holdings of reference materials, materials in the various subject-matter fields, and on the Negro. Periodical holdings were checked against the recent list of periodicals suitable for high school libraries published by the State Department of Education in Tennessee. Books in the social sciences, the sciences, applied science, and history were evaluated for their proportion in the collections and for their recency. Spot samplings were made of the collections in twenty-four selected subject areas, and the schools were rated and ranked for their holdings on each of these subjects. Throughout, the conditions which deter the functionalism of the school library were isolated as specific problems.

The basic reason for selecting these particular schools as samples of Negro public school library service in the South, was

that they were located in the larger southern cities where public education is more fully developed. Whatever problems pertain to the libraries of these Negro public schools will be magnified in school systems in smaller cities and rural areas where public education for Negroes is developed to a lesser degree.

These schools were selected also because they cover a complete qualitative range of Negro public school libraries--good, medium, and poor. This is predicated on the belief that wherever state and local school library agencies function effectively good school library service results, and that variants are found depending upon the extensiveness and efficiency of state and local school library programs.

The five general problems which have emerged from this investigation are problems of finance; scientific planning; training of school personnel--administrators, teachers, and librarians; centralized direction and supervision; and evaluation of school library service in terms of school philosophy and objectives. These problems are common to the development of school library service at the state level, to the local school programs as a whole, and to the development of individual school libraries.

State School Library Agencies

State educational agencies have recognized the value of library service to the success of education and have developed measures to make adequate library service equally available to all schools within the state. These measures consist of a wide range of supervisory activities at the state level, including assistance in book selection; collection, compilation, interpretation of school library statistics; field service; dissemination of pertinent printed matter; assistance with training programs in state-supported institutions; and in-service training through conferences and institutes; enforcement of standards and the stimulation of state-wide interest in school library development. In addition to these supervisory and advisory activities, state aid has been made available in different forms to assist schools in acquiring more adequate school library materials. To insure the employment of qualified school library personnel the states, through certification laws, have been instrumental in raising personnel standards and have stimulated training programs for school librarianship.

The movement at the state level to develop school library

service is relatively new throughout the country. Perhaps more has been done in the Southern states because of the greater need for state help due to the uneven distribution of wealth and the inability of local educational administrative units to plan and finance their own programs. The problems of state school library agencies are made more acute because they must serve two separate educational systems in this area. An analysis of the state programs indicated that the problems of finance, scientific planning, training of school personnel, direction and supervision, and evaluation were basic to the state programs.

The Schools: Conditions Affecting the Libraries

School library service and problems cannot be considered separately from the programs and problems of the school, thus there must be an understanding of the framework in which the school and library operate. The problems inherent in the school philosophy and objectives, school organization, and the problems of the group of people served will be reflected in the problems of the school library. Therefore, it was first necessary to isolate general school problems which have had a direct bearing on the rise and development of school library service.

The following conditions found in the schools and communities held significant implications for school library service. First, the lack of educational philosophy and objectives without which school activities and policies cannot be planned, executed, and measured for effectiveness. Next, the low rate of pupil retention in these schools has most important implications for school and public library service for Negro youth, who drop out of school at an early age largely because of economic conditions. Then, the high teacher-pupil ratios in some schools provide too little opportunity for teachers to direct and guide pupils in reading and using the school library. Also, traditional teaching methods are a tremendous barrier to the stimulation of broad reading interests and use of library materials. Finally, the indifference of large numbers of pupils toward their school work is a condition which explains to some extent the meager use of available library facilities. To a great extent some of the causal factors of these conditions may be found in the five general problems which emerged from this study.

School Libraries

In evaluating the functionalism of school libraries in the twenty selected schools by the application of state, regional, and national school library standards, by means of specially constructed checklists of library materials, and through generally accepted principles of school librarianship, there were uncovered other conditions indicative of the five general problems in addition to those found at state and local school levels. In general, the materials collections of these school libraries were found to be inadequate as to size and quality and there was a lack of necessary organization and equipment for their proper use. Retarded reading ability and a predominant interest in cheap and mediocre reading materials--such as pulp magazines and inferior fiction secured largely from newsstands, drug stores, and dime stores--constitute the major reading problems that affect the educational program and use of the library. Definite remedial reading and reading guidance programs sponsored by the teaching staffs or by the librarians were practically nonexistent in these schools. Librarian and teacher relationships generally were congenial, but not enough co-operation actually existed between them.

The functionalism of these school libraries was curtailed in some cases by inadequate facilities and administrative provision for library attendance. The circulation and use of materials were restricted because of inflexible circulation policies, the failure to encourage pupils to use the library to do school assignments, and the absence of motivating activities to develop reading as an avocation.

The schools have made marked progress in securing the services of librarians with good educational backgrounds, professional training, and desirable personal traits, yet some of the schools are still without librarians with any of these requisites, and the training of others has not represented a well organized course of study, but rather a cumulation of course credits for duplication of course content. The personal traits of several librarians were found to be undesirable because they were unfriendly, had little interest in pupils, and lacked the ability and strength of purpose necessary to initiate and promote an effective school library program. In the majority of these schools there was limited administrative provision made for the utilization of the professional

services of school librarians to the best advantage.

Inadequate funds with which to purchase school library materials, to pay school librarians, and the lack of careful planning and budgeting of available funds were the major financial difficulties discovered.

The above conditions and problems point up the evidence out of which develop the major problems of finance, scientific planning, training of school personnel, direction and supervision, and evaluation. In subsequent sections each of these five problems will be discussed as they pertain to the state, the school, and the school libraries. Recommendations for future planning and improvement of conditions will be made as each problem is discussed.

Finance

Because of the integrated nature of the financial problem which affects all aspects of the educational program and the school library program at both the state and local levels, this may be considered the problem of greatest magnitude. The practical solution of the other four major problems is intrinsically correlated with how successfully the financial problem can be solved.

State School Library Agencies

The most acute problem of state and school library agencies is the lack of adequate funds with which to promote and develop state-wide programs to aid public school library service. All aspects of the state program suffer in various degrees because of limited financial resources. Because of inadequate funds sufficient personnel cannot be hired to carry on activities in the state offices, and to do the field work necessary for developing a dynamic state school library program. With larger staffs, perhaps the necessary measures could be taken to collect, compile, interpret, and use accurate and reliable statistical and factual data concerning school library service.

Another problem of finance at the state level has two aspects. The first concerns the securing of adequate funds to offer state aid to schools for the purchase of library materials, and the second pertains to state school library agencies in administering state-aid funds so that they are equally and evenly distributed to Negro and white schools. The acquisition of adequate funds to

carry on the program of state school library agencies and to offer adequate state aid for public school library service, is a problem to be solved with that of securing more state funds for education in general within the individual states.

Local Schools

The conditions affecting school library service found in the twenty schools and caused basically by deficient financial support, include housing, furnishings, and work materials necessary to the general school program. New school buildings, or remodeled structures with adequate space and modern facilities, are urgently needed to provide healthy and pleasant surroundings for pupils. Inadequate funds for salaries are in many cases responsible for the employment of too few teachers, librarians, and clerical workers. This affects the teaching program as well as that of the library because there is insufficient personnel to develop reading guidance and remedial reading programs. Then teachers and librarians often have to spend too much time in routine clerical work at the expense of their professional responsibilities.

School Libraries

The problem of securing enough money with which to purchase library materials is a most serious one in this group of schools. Only five schools receive state aid; thirteen schools receive funds for library materials from local boards of education. Six schools are forced to raise part or all of the money for the purchase of library materials. Much time and effort of teachers, librarians, pupils, and parents is used in money-raising activities. It is an unfortunate situation because the provision of adequate funds for school library service should be made by local school boards. The failure of some schools to receive adequate support for school libraries is partially due to the reluctance of school administrators to make their needs known and to be persistent in their requests for funds. School administrators are often not sufficiently acquainted with state school library laws and standards and the details of procedure necessary for securing financial assistance from state and local school agencies.

All of these conditions pertaining to state library agencies, local schools, and school libraries reveal how extensive and serious the need is for financial provision for Negro public

schools and public school library service. Since these things are basic and fundamental in the maintenance and perpetuation of an efficient school program, unless adequate money is made available Negro public school libraries cannot be expected to meet the needs of pupils and the requirements of state, regional, and national standards. This problem of lack of funds affects the entire library program and has particular bearing upon planning current and future programs.

Recommendations

One solution to the financial problem can be found in Federal aid to education. Another solution would involve a revision of the present systems of taxation so that the amount of money secured through taxation would bear a closer relationship to educational needs of the state than they do at present. State legislatures and departments of education would need to appropriate additional funds for school library service. Regardless of how much money is available for state aid to school libraries, there remains the obligation of the state school library agency to distribute the funds to the benefit of Negro and white schools. This would entail a revision of policy on the part of school library agencies. The new policy would be that school officials of counties and local school systems would agree to distribute equitably money received from the state between the two separate school systems. State school library officials should be given through legislation the power to enforce this policy once it is established.

Local school boards, with the aid of state funds where it is necessary, should provide adequate school buildings with the needed furniture and equipment, and they should make available enough money to permit the employment of the required number of qualified and competent teachers, clerical workers, and school librarians to carry on the school program effectively. The provision of sufficient funds from local school boards for the maintenance of school libraries will eliminate the need for expending considerable time in money-raising activities by school personnel. Negro school administrators need to be more aggressive in seeking their share of financial support from cities and states for the schools as a whole, and for school libraries in particular, by making known their specific needs in the form of detailed and itemized budgets.

If provision could be made to secure funds regularly for

the library, the problems of budget-making and careful planning of book selection could be solved. However, in order to be sure that money is always spent to the best advantage, school librarians should keep files of materials needed and purchase these when funds are available. Book orders should be spaced so that materials can be purchased throughout the school year as needs arise and as new materials are made available. The practice of purchasing useless and inferior sets of books on deferred-payment plans is most unsound from the point of view of finance and book selection, and the practice of purchasing sets of books from subscription agents should be discouraged.

Scientific Planning

Scientific planning of the educational program, including library service, presupposes professional training which enables one to develop a basic philosophy on which definite aims and objectives are formulated. Also, such planning is based upon a knowledge of the available financial resources.

State School Library Agencies

Planning by the officials of state school library agencies for the development of school libraries has been restricted because of the lack of funds and personnel to initiate, develop, and execute plans. All the state school library agencies have clearly defined objectives out of which their activities have grown. However, plans with regard to serving Negro schools have not been extensively developed for these same reasons. There is a need for more active policies to be adhered to relative to distribution of available state-aid funds to Negro schools and to place on equal footing all services rendered by the state school library agency.

Schools and School Libraries

The majority of the schools in this study had no definite guiding philosophy, the absence of which left a void in regard to definitive policies, and consequently objectives were not even considered. Since school philosophy, objectives, and policies coalesce so intimately with school library philosophy, objectives, and policies, the two necessitate parallel development--first, for the school as a whole, and then, for the school library. Unless this

basic planning, which is germane to all development and progress, is given its rightful importance, these Negro public schools and school libraries will continue functioning in their substandard manner. School library philosophy is derived from that of the school; school library activities are planned to advance school objectives, and the success of the school library program can best be evaluated in terms of its effectiveness in achieving the goals of the school. In the absence of sound philosophical planning there is no definite guidance for the expenditure of available funds, for the development of the library's materials collection, for planning reading guidance and remedial reading programs, for directing and stimulating library use, and for many other aspects of library service. It is possible that the lack of philosophy and objectives in the majority of these schools is due to the failure on the part of school administrators, teachers, and librarians to put into practice the educational principles they have learned, or it may be the result of the deficient professional training of school personnel.

Recommendations

Pending increased funds and personnel for state school library agencies, it is recommended that each state add to the staff of the state school library agency a Negro state supervisor of public school libraries. This supervisor would work with the director of the state school library agency to supervise Negro school librarians and develop Negro school library service in the state as a whole.

Either on the basis of regional planning,¹ or state-wide planning, co-operative measures for aiding school library service should be developed. Centralized and co-operative buying of printed and audio-visual materials could be made in the states without such a plan. As in the state of Georgia, printed catalog cards could be provided at a minimum cost with the books purchased through the state offices.

Each school should formulate its philosophy, objectives, and policies and plan school activities accordingly. Then school

¹For a program of regional planning for public school library service, see Wilma Bennet, "A Plan for Regional Administration of School Library Service in Indiana" (Unpublished Master's thesis, Graduate Library School, University of Chicago, 1942).

librarians should derive library objectives and plan library service that will contribute to the fulfilment of school goals.

Training of School Personnel

The development of a functional school library program is dependent upon the co-operative planning and work of principals, teachers, and librarians. Such co-operation and work must be built upon an understanding secured through emphasizing the responsibilities of these faculty members relative to the development of such a library program. This can only be brought about by securing the best professionally trained school personnel.

Little has been done by the state school library agencies for the training of school librarians. More intensive state supervision of training agencies is needed, together with more activities to instruct and stimulate school administrators, teachers, and librarians concerning effective school library service.

From the findings of this study it is apparent that many school administrators have not been fully aware of the effective place that the school library occupies in the general school program, and, therefore, have not made administrative provision for the proper development of a functional school library program. It is also evident from the findings that the teaching personnel has not been suitably impressed with the inherent value of the school library to effective teaching. Teachers have been unable to motivate and direct pupils in the use of library materials because they themselves have not become acquainted with and learned to use a wide variety of book and nonbook materials. In some cases the absolute lack of school library training, or limited training, was responsible for ineffective school libraries, and in a few other cases there was an ostensible failure on the part of trained library personnel to exercise the knowledge they had received in carrying out their library duties and responsibilities. The failures and weaknesses of school personnel that affect school library service might be overcome and strengthened by more direction and supervision from the personnel of local, state, and regional school library agencies.

Recommendations

It is recommended that a central agency, possibly the Atlanta University School of Library Service, in Atlanta, Georgia,

act in an advisory capacity to Negro institutions offering courses for the training of school librarians. An initial step in the development of the advisory service would be the employment by the central agency of a field service worker to visit Negro colleges offering training for school librarians and examine the current situation in each state. On the basis of these findings and upon the recommendations made by state school library supervisors and other experts in the field, state and regional plans could be projected for the improvement of training for school librarianship. The next step would be the planning of annual state and regional seminars for instructors of courses in library service in Negro colleges. The seminars would also be attended by state school library officials and other authorities in the field. Some of the purposes of these meetings would be:

1. To determine the courses that should be offered in the training of school librarians.
2. To set up admission requirements.
3. To determine the amount of credit to be assigned each course.
4. To evaluate teaching personnel, as regards training and experience.
5. To reappraise school librarians already employed and to develop state programs for increasing the efficiency of librarians in service.

The professional training of school administrators should include the importance of the school librarian in the educational program and a knowledge of the administrative policies necessary to facilitate functional school library development. Further, the professional training of teachers should give attention to the importance of school library service to effective teaching, the ways in which teachers can co-operate in the development of school library service, and to acquaint teachers with the knowledge and techniques of how to use a wide variety of instructional materials. As regards training programs for school librarians, they are to be examined and revised periodically to keep their content and quality up to acceptable regional, state, and local standards. It is also recommended that all advisory service, both state and regional, be made available to instructors of courses for school librarians in Negro colleges.

Each school should develop in-service training activities to inform, stimulate, and guide school personnel concerning the

importance, use, and development of school libraries. This training should include faculty study groups, formal and informal discussion groups in the city, state, and region, individual study and reading about school libraries and related subjects such as remedial reading and reading guidance, membership in and attendance at meetings of educational and library organizations. Finally, every school librarian should be required to secure basic professional library training, and to acquire subsequent advanced training in the field.

Direction and Supervision

In all schools in this study there had been far too little contact of school personnel with school library supervisors, and field service work from local school boards, state departments of education, and from the school library field service office of the Atlanta University School of Library Service. In many cases available school library supervision and direction had not been sought from these agencies, and in others insufficient personnel and funds prohibited the agencies from rendering advisory services to the schools. These problems were reflected in the limited visits by field workers, the small amount of printed and mimeographed materials circulated, the lack of local or state sponsored professional meetings to discuss school and library programs, and the absence of in-service training programs, such as work conferences and institutes. The suggestions, stimulation, and evaluation received from experts who come into the schools with objective viewpoints and a wide experience and knowledge of school library problems, are invaluable to the initiation, development, and continuous progress of functional school libraries. Continuous progress, however, cannot be assured unless the services, use, and effectiveness of the library program are studied and evaluated by school personnel with the aid and guidance of local, state, and regional school library agencies.

Recommendations

To improve the quality of school libraries through advisory services it would be necessary to increase the personnel in the offices of state school library agencies. This would make it possible to offer more extensive supervision and direction in both Negro and white schools; and, as has been previously mentioned,

Negro supervisors should be employed to work more closely with Negro schools which are in dire need of such services. More supervisory services should also be provided by city school systems and this might result in advantageous and economical planning of school library services. School principals and librarians should ascertain what library advisory services exist in the city, state, and region and make full use of them.

Evaluation

The last major problem that is common to all phases of school library service at the regional, state, city, and school levels is the problem of evaluation of school and library programs. No evaluation nor planning program can be effected in the absence of accurate statistical and factual data concerning school library planning, finance, personnel, materials collections, use, library policies, and activities. In over half of the schools in this study the absence of statistical records, and library reports, and the interpretation and use of such records and reports was a serious handicap in determining actual conditions and problems.

In four states statistical data about school libraries were not available, and in one state no distinction was made in statistical records between Negro and white school libraries. Without collection and compilation of such data separately for Negro and white schools in each state, there is no way to make comparative studies of facilities and progress and to measure the extent to which equal opportunities for education exist in dual educational systems. Then in the absence of state statistical and factual data about school libraries, the necessary information vital to regional studies and planning is not available.

Recommendations

State school library statistics for Negro and white schools should be recorded separately and published at stated intervals. Accurate factual and statistical annual reports should be made to local and state school library officials to inform them of the activities, problems, progress, and needs of the school library. In the light of school philosophy and objectives the library program should be periodically reappraised to determine how effective the library has been in the total school program.

